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Long Branch set to ban smoking on beach

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Written by: [Carol Gorga Williams | Staff Writer](#)

LONG BRANCH — The City Council tonight is expected to join several other Shore communities in declaring all its public beaches to be smoke-free.

In 2003, the city limited smoking to designated beachfront areas.

Since then, business at the city's beachfront has boomed, officials said, and as more and more people used the beaches, it became more and more difficult to isolate smokers or to enforce the limited ordinance.

Instead, on June 14, the council unanimously introduced a measure to make its entire public beach smoke-free and scheduled a public hearing tonight, after which the ordinance would be scheduled for final adoption.

The public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. in council chambers on the second floor of City Hall on Broadway.

The measure could be in place for the city's massive Oceanfest July 4 celebration, although there is one caveat; smoking still would be permitted on the city's boardwalk. But that right might also go away if Mayor Adam Schneider has his way.

"I'd like to extend it to all city properties," he said noting the city's partial ban in 2003 "got overwhelmingly positive reviews. The vast majority of people followed the rules and I think we made great progress."

City Business Administrator Howard H. Woolley Jr. said the idea to extend the ban to all city beaches came from the city's administration as authorities noted how problematic enforcing a partial band had become.

Now anyone found smoking cigarettes, cigars or any tobacco product or using chewing tobacco would face a fine of \$100 for a first offense, \$200 for a second offense and \$300 for a third offense, according to the proposed ordinance.

Long Branch will join Seaside Park, Ocean Grove, Lower Township's Sunset Beach in Cape May County and Somers Point as completely smoke-free beaches, according to Karen Blumenfeld of the New Jersey Chapter of Global Advisors Smokefree Policy or GASP.

Belmar was among the first communities in the nation to require its beaches and boardwalk go smoke-free, she said.

The group maintains that research has shown secondhand smoke exposure even in outdoor locations can cause serious health problems, especially for children, asthmatics and people with compromised cardiovascular systems.

Some 115 municipalities and eight New Jersey counties have placed restrictions on smoking in public locations, according to GASP.